

Sharing US Fish and Wildlife Resources at Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge through Maintenance Assistance Team Projects

In the summer and early fall 2014, members of Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge staff Daryl Johnson, Maintenance Helper; Brett Hartwig, Law Enforcement Officer; and Frank Enright, Engineering Equipment Operator, got a chance to work with a Maintenance Assistance Team (MAT). This collaborative work concept saved the federal government thousands of dollars and enabled sharing of manpower from refuges during a period of declining or flat budgets.

In collaboration with Bill Starke, MAT coordinator for the Northeast Region, a scheduled MAT project brought engineering equipment operators from various refuges to complete a road repair project in a short amount of time. The project rehabilitated Forest Road 80, a road at Canaan Valley that had experienced damage during a heavy rainfall event in May 2014. The road runs across refuge property and is heavily used by the public. The damage to it impeded access for hunters, hikers, and general public.

In efforts to reopen the road, Deputy Refuge Manager Richard Zane organized the delivery of construction materials. Members of the MAT team from other Northeast Region refuges provided valuable expertise, including technical talent and experience along with many hours of labor. Jason Young, from Lake Umbagog NWR in Errol, New Hampshire; Eddie Darlington, from Harrison Lake National Fish Hatchery in Charles City, Virginia; and Jeff Graves, from Montezuma NWR in Seneca Falls, New York, worked tirelessly alongside local Canaan Valley staff until the work was completed. The project removed old culverts and installed 16 new 22-24 inch culverts. Several drainage diversions were constructed along the road ditches and around culvert openings. Appropriately sized stone was placed along the steep bank where most of the damage had occurred to slow and impede erosion. A layer of gravel along the entire road finished the work.

Local Canaan Valley NWR staff and MAT team members worked almost continuously for two weeks. This allowed for the work to be completed at a very fast pace. This type of coordination shows utilizing FWS resources, whether it is manpower or equipment, makes the project and comradery mean much more than just work. This collaborative work also pays off in big cost savings. An original estimate of \$650,000 for materials, salaries, and additional expenses had been generated by the Federal Highway Administration. With the MAT approach, the Service saved more than \$500,000 on the project.

In addition to this project, Daryl Johnson and Frank Enright from Canaan Valley NWR joined a MAT at Back Bay NWR near Virginia Beach, Virginia, and Occoquan NWR in Woodbridge, Virginia. They removed several miles of military style fence that inhibited the view. In addition, while on this project they removed extraneous vegetation and unneeded structures on former hog farms.

Canaan Valley NWR Project Leader Ron Hollis expressed his appreciation. "It is never too late to recognize people who want to help others by getting the job done," Hollis said. He added, "We are very thankful for the opportunity to assist the MAT projects at Back Bay and Occoquan, as well as the experience earned for our refuge staff. Thank you to the project leaders who allowed MAT members to travel to our refuge here at Canaan Valley and work on our long-overdue road project during this busy time."